

TRINIDAD IN TRANSITION

The years after Slavery

By Donald Wood

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Review by Robert Moore.

Conflicts of culture, not only conflicts of race, have become the condition of the 20th century. But there are not uniquely a 20th century phenomenon. Trinidad is case in point; for 30th odd years after emancipation, its society was in search of unity. This book "Trinidad in Transition" by Donald Wood describes the search and the solution. The old white French family resented the missionary arrogance of the Anglo - Saxon elite; Roman Catholics were outraged by protestant contempt of there long - estaglished hold on society. But more fundamental - and for the future more monentous - was the question of the place in society of the nergoes. Emacipation had made them free, but there cultural and racial attributes were regarded as unequal. The whites wanted them to pratice the industrial ethic of work, and to learn the moral verities of Europe. The nergoes wanted to express the ethic of independence and to preserve the survivals of Africa. And as if to complicate the riddle Trinidad became the importer of people; a few from Europe Africa and China the vast majority from India. Bringing to Trinidad a solid support for the sugar industry, the Indians also brought a high culture, stubbornly resilient, and capable of adjustment without transformation. In a word they were ecomomically integrated, but culturally outside.

By 1860 all tranditions met in Trinidad, but were not necessarily on speaking terms. How was the solution found? Donald Wood suggests three answers. First Sir Arthur Gordon, the island greatest govenor for the century, abondoned the policy of refashioning Trinidad in the image of Britian. He officially recognised the strenght Latin Tradition, and stopped the policy of trying to undermine the Latin Church. This meant that, with tension relaxed Trinidad was on here way to becoming a cultural melting pot instead of being a cultural battle ground. Secondly, buy a liberal policy of opening Crown Lands to settlement Gordon secured legally to the Negroes the right to landed independence; and policy of granting land to the Indians, in place of back passages to India, rooted them in the soil of Trinidad. From there the began the long march to the centre of society. Finally he sees in carnival a unifying theraputic and culturally democratic force - a form of saturnalia where the nergoes could affirm there own cultural without apology and ridicule the whites with our pushiment; where people selve in another; and where aggression, of one cultural would dress themseve

pent up for a year, could have a healing outlet. This is a good peace of historical writing. But its relevance goes beyond historians. Among those in the Caribbean to whom imitation of the old metropolis is no longer cultural salvation it ought to provide stimulating and fruitful discussion.